We Were Cadets

ROTC Socialization vs. Self-Selection in the development of Army Officers

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation
with distinction in Criminology in the undergraduate colleges
of The Ohio State University

by

Kris Whittenberger

The Ohio State University
May 2006

Project Advisor: Professor Timothy Curry,
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences

INTRODUCTION

The Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program at The Ohio State University is one of the best leadership courses in the country and has been a major part of my college curriculum for the past two years. Through classes, labs, and field training, ROTC teaches students first-hand what it takes to lead others, motivate groups, and techniques to conduct missions as an Officer in the United States Army. It prepares Cadets with the tools, training, and experiences that they will need to succeed in any competitive environment. Army ROTC is an elective curriculum that has to be completed on top of the required college classes. The process of becoming an Army Officer through ROTC is long and complex, and is a challenge that not everyone who tries is able to achieve. There are very specific needs and requirements of those seeking to enter the role of a Junior Officer, and the Army has techniques to mold those who are compatible with those expectations into soldiers suitable for the role of Second Lieutenants. It is the mission of the Cadre at Ohio State not only to develop Cadets into officers, but also ensure that only those Cadets who are physically, mentally, and emotionally sound are commissioned into the Army. Upon graduation from Army ROTC, Cadets earn the Rank of a Second Lieutenant.

Our nation is currently fighting two wars, and young officers are needed to train and lead troops into combat. Lieutenants are put in charge of anywhere from 20 to 40 soldiers - soldiers who have more experience and time in the Army than the very officer given command over them. These leaders must be ready to make sound judgment as soon as they reach their units, as time is not a luxury afforded during periods of conflict. ROTC summer and campus training is meant to train Cadets to the highest level possible

in order to present proficient young leaders to fill these available high risk roles as soon as possible.

I looked at key events from my past which led up to my decision to join the Army. These past experiences helped me identify the anticipatory socialization that encouraged me to make the decision to join the military. Activities, clubs, and relationships from my past developed me into a mind-set compatible with most military attitudes. I then looked at the process of socialization the Army undertakes to train students to become its future leaders through the history of my ROTC career. Based on my personal experiences, I decided to test the hypothesis that socialization events which occur during one's experiences in the ROTC program are the most important in developing the mentality of an Army officer when compared to self-selection and life experiences prior to joining the military.

To test my hypothesis, I created a questionnaire to investigate the experiences of others to see if their experiences are in support of my initial hypothesis. I wanted to see if there is a common socialization theme that is responsible for like minded individuals choosing to become officers. One of my research questions is if certain life-styles are common to creating a mentality that is related to that of the military mentality. There are common trends that would point towards certain lifestyles or behaviors that lead people towards choosing the military for a career.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ROLES

The sociological concept of Social Roles is, "when people occupy social positions, their behavior is determined mainly by what is expected of that position rather than by their own individual characteristics," (Abercrombie: 301). This theory applies directly to the rank hierarchy of positions in the Army. These different roles are so strongly stressed and maintained by the military that they dictate where the soldiers occupying those roles live, relax, and the people with whom they are allowed to associate with. Army laws are made to prevent fraternization among officers and enlisted; maintaining these professional and social boundaries is very important. There is a very distinct and distinguished role for officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men in the Army.

The role of an officer is to be the leader at all times. The good officers lead by example, and would never ask their troops to do anything they themselves would not do. An officer's primary responsibilities are to ensure mission completion, maintain accountability of their men and equipment, maintain a high level of training, and to take care of their troops. Officers are legally responsible for all the troops and equipment in their specific unit. An additional responsibility of officers is to provide the link between the commanders and their unit. They represent their unit at all meetings and planning operations, and in turn convey all the information pertinent to the unit back to the soldiers. It is important for officers to maintain a social distance from all soldiers they are responsible for in order to not develop favorites, to maintain respect, and remain the authoritative figure in the minds and hearts of their soldiers.

The non-commissioned officer (NCO) is the back-bone of the Army. These soldiers are responsible for maintaining accountability of their soldiers and ensuring the completion of the mission. The common phrase used by NCOs is, "I'm not an officer, I work for a living." This translates into although the officers are in charge of planning operations; it is the NCOs that ensure missions are carried out. The officer tells the NCO what they want done; and the NCO completes it. NCOs are the ones physically carrying out the orders, directing their soldiers as to accomplish the mission presented to them. They should maintain a high level of discipline to ensure the unit is always ready for deployments or emergencies. Therefore, another responsibility of NCOs is to be the disciplinary figure. They are the one who screams at inefficient Soldiers, drops formations into push-ups because someone is late, and ensures misbehaving Soldiers are disciplined. Lastly, the NCO is in charge of ensuring the Soldiers are taken care of. The NCOs often know their troops better than officers, and therefore are responsible for aiding soldiers with personal problems.

The last critical position in the army is the enlisted men. Enlisted Soldiers are the grunts of the army; actually carrying out the wishes of the commanders and NCOs. The role of the enlisted men is simple: do what you are told to do, when you are told to do it, to the best of your ability. They are supposed to learn as much as possible throughout their training. The role of an enlisted Soldier emphasizes not questioning authority and to do what they are told no matter how bizarre or stupid the order may seem to you. Good soldiers will react to orders in a split second, which is exactly what they would have to do in combat.

It is important for the Officers and NCOs to remember the reason they have their jobs is due to the enlisted men; if they didn't have any troops they wouldn't be the leaders of anyone. The very distinct roles create an elaborate division of labor within the army; however it is critical for successful units to maintain unit cohesion despite these differences. To maintain this cohesion, good NCOs are just as quick to compliment and reward their troops for jobs well done as they are to discipline them. Officers are the highest ranking person in their unit, but it is important for them to lend a hand to their soldiers when there is work that needs done.

Harry Gracey discusses stepping into roles in the book *Down to Earth Sociology*. In Chapter 33 entitled *Learning the Student Role: Kindergarten as Academic Boot Camp*, he discusses the process of kindergarten children being trained into becoming good students (Henslin: Chpt 33). Our society deems good students as those who display qualities such as: listening to the teacher, raising their hands, not fighting, walking in the halls, etc… Gracey then describes acts the children are told to partake in that are referred to as, "doing what you're told and never mind why," (Henslin: 389). These are actions that may be beneficial to the children, such as nap time or gym class; however they are not understood by the children yet. The teacher understands that many of the lessons taught to the students are necessary not only for their academic advancement but also to socialize them as to expectations of social conduct used by our society.

This same concept exists at Army basic training. Just as with Kindergarten, young soldiers come into the Army from all different backgrounds, levels of experience, and knowledge. It is the duty of the Drill Instructors to train and socialize all these

different men and women so that they are prepared for the specific customs and roles of the Army. Every institution has its own unique characteristics; however the Army has significantly more norms and mores than most organizations due to it being one of the oldest professions in the United States. In order to bring new soldiers up to speed on the many small technicalities they must master to be a good soldier, the Army utilizes a training method known to sociologists as total institution.

TOTAL INSTITUTION

In Chapter 2 of Zurcher's book *Social Roles*, he discusses the concept of the total institution while studying social effects of new recruits at a Navy boot camp. The concept of the total institution was first developed by Erving Goffman in the 1960s. He described total institution as a place, "of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life," (Zurcher: 19). The main concepts of the total institution are: daily life carried out with a large group, tightly kept schedules, all people living in similar circumstances and under one authority, a distinct separation between supervisors and administrators, and accomplishing activities for a specific reason being the plan of the institution. Goffman theorized that the longer an individual is part of a total institution, the more 'institutionalized' an individual becomes. In other words, they begin to take on the values, goals, and customs of the very institution in which they belong.

A concept associated with many total institutions, especially military boot camps, are degradation ceremonies. This is an informal process at the beginning of the institution phase in which all members are stripped down of everything in order that they

can be molded to the institution's desires. This includes taking all personal possessions, getting military haircuts, dressing all members the same, and 'informing' members of the institution rules.

Similar to Navy recruits, Army Cadets undergo training that can be described as a total institution. We are sent to camps for weeks at a time where everything we do is military related. We sleep, eat, and train together; and we have limited contact with the outside world. The institutionalization occurs without much pressure and is usually unnoticed by those involved. I can strongly identify with this concept through my own experiences.

I always return from military training in what I call, 'Army Mode', which is really the effects of my institutionalization. I use Army jargon to an extent that my non-military friends have to remind me they have no idea what I am talking about. I wake up earlier due to my pre-programmed schedule, I eat faster, and I work out more often. If I have nothing to do, I worry about what I am not getting done at the time. The transition from civilian life and Army training life takes some getting used to.

THE DEBATE OF SELF-SELECTION AND SOCIALIZATION

The debate of nature versus nurture finds its way into the socialization of an Army officer. One of the main sociological questions concerning the creation of the officer is whether the values needed to be a successful leader are self-imposed or socialized through Army training. Those who argue towards socialization use examples of Soldiers taking on the values and customs of their units. In a study of Soldiers during basic training, one researcher noticed, "…combat arms recruits were effectively socialized into accepting military values and adopting a sense of solidarity, although some features of

the training itself were viewed negatively," (Cockerham: 501). An additional study found Cadets entering a British Army-run school came with many different regional dialects: however upon completion all new officers spoke with an upper-class accent. These are two examples supporting the argument that socialization is the key process in the creation of officers.

William C. Cockerham is a former Soldier who participated in Airborne and Jumpmaster training. In his opinion, self selection holds much more weight than socialization. He states:

> Although military socialization provides the cadet or trainee with knowledge of military values, norms, traditions, and styles of behavior, the determining factor in the potential for pro-military attitudes and beliefs appears to be the personal set of attitudes brought to the training situation by the trainee. In view of the changeover to an all-volunteer force by the military in most advanced countries, the self-selection thesis becomes even more significant as all who become members of the military do so by virtue of their willingness to select military service for themselves.

Cockerham also points out, "…people do not change their basic personality or attitudes and values because they are subjected to airborne training; instead, that training confirmed their self-image as action-oriented and served to enhance preexisting attitudes and values that had guided their selection of a desired military role," (Cockerham: 502).

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM & ARMY RISK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Risk is structurally built into the Army. Being in the Army puts individuals at risk because of the very nature of army work; they are organizing a group of young to middle age people, predominantly male, with the objective of being able to effectively engage and destroy other large masses of people determined to kill them first. Troops are involved in: shooting guns, driving vehicles fast, blowing up structures, carrying around

explosives, jumping out of airplanes, and many other inherently dangerous activities. Additionally, these activities are almost always done in the middle of the wilderness, miles away from hospitals or even ground vehicle access.

These risks are important because they prepare soldiers for similar risks and situations which they will face during deployments and actual engagements. Without facing these risks, there would be no victory, and the United States Army can not afford to finish anywhere but first when fighting military conflicts.

Since these risks are such an integral aspect in the structure of the army, the need arises to partake in the risky activities as frequently as possible, while at the same time minimizing the consequences of uncontrolled risk; which could lead to injuries or even death. To act as a buffer to decrease such occurrences, the army created the Risk Management System.

The Army Risk Management System has one purpose; make the dangerous activities the Army must accomplish not as risky. All aspects of training are given a level of risk: L-low, M-medium, H-high, and E-extremely high. It is then the responsibility of the architect of the risk assessment form to include ways to lower the risk for that particular training activity.

For example, if a unit wanted to partake in pool physical fitness training, one of the risks involved would be weak/non-swimmers in the pool. This activity would therefore be evaluated as a high risk activity. In order for the officer in charge of the training to lower the risk, he must address the risk through several precautions. These steps could include: identifying and marking weak/non-swimmers, utilizing the buddy-system by pairing weak swimmers with strong swimmers, coordinating to have lifeguards

present during the water training, or keeping most of the activities in the shallow end of the pool. These steps would take the risk level down from H-high to L-low because the risk of weak swimmers drowning would be almost completely eliminated through proper coordination prior to the training.

Risk is a structural function of all areas of being a Soldier. Good leaders must become familiar with and be able to mitigate these risks in order to ensure the safety of their troops. In addition to being able to mitigate the risks to Soldiers, Officers must also be able to control their men. Many soldiers join the Army due to the thrills involved with the job. Dr. Richard Friedman wrote concerning those persons who are lured towards danger. "Many of life's greatest pleasure feel good because, in the end, they cause the release of dopamine from the brain's reward pathway. Sex, food and recreational drugs all flood the brain with dopamine – and so does thrill seeking," (Friedman: 1). Soldiers jump out of airplanes, drive fast, shoot guns, and rappel from helicopters; and at the same time most of them get a huge thrill and sense of satisfaction from the ordeal. Therefore, it is imperative that an officer not only create safe situations for their men to train, they must also ensure their men complete the tasks safely.

LEADERSHIP EVALUATIONS

A critical aspect in the training of Cadets is the evaluation process. The Leadership Assessment Report is meant to instill in officers in training the proper character needed to be successful leaders (CDT CMD Form 156-4A-R). The report first covers seven Army Values: *loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage*. These values form the building block for officers and all must be appropriately practiced by Cadets at all times. In addition to the seven values, there are

also sixteen leadership dimensions that are placed into three categories: attributes, skills, and actions. Attributes include *mental, physical*, and *emotional*. Skills are *conceptual, interpersonal, technical,* and *tactical*. Actions are broken down further into three sub-categories: influencing includes *communicating, decision-making*, and *motivating*; operating involves *planning*, *executing*, and *assessing*, and improving contains *developing*, *building*, and *learning*.

Together these 23 characteristics of an officer are used to judge the current ability and potential of evaluated Cadets. They receive individual counseling to discuss which values they showed excellence, satisfaction, or needed improvement. The Cadre or Senior Cadet Evaluator ensures to explain shortcomings to the rated Cadet, then offer suggestions or comments for self-improvement. It is important for Cadets being evaluated to listen and learn from each counseling session in order to make advancements towards developing proficiency in the necessary dimensions of an Army Officer.

EPIPHANIES

A good way to identify socialization is through the use of epiphanies. "These turning points or experiences that the respondent recollects are termed epiphanies…major epiphanies concern important turning point or moment of truth when character is revealed" (Curry: 275). Throughout the process of becoming an officer, Cadets face many dilemmas. How they respond to these challenges determines whether they are capable of being leaders in today's Army. These life changing events appear several times in my own life history. Epiphanies were also important in helping me categorize levels of socialization in those Cadets interviewed.

METHODS

To see if socialization or self-selection was more critical in Cadet development, I used two techniques. First, I looked at my own life history, and then interviewed ten OSU ROTC Cadets. Next, I categorized the recorded responses from the cadets. I combined my own experiences with those provided by the interviewed subjects to determine if the results supported or contradicted my hypothesis.

Collecting the data for my own life history was much more difficult than originally anticipated. I had to call home, look at scrap books, dig through old planners, talk with old friends, and view old academic records on-line. The information I had to write on memory alone is not terribly reliable either; there is a definite chance that I unintentionally wrote emotions I feel now which were not my actual feelings at the time. The portions of my life history that were constructed during the writing of my thesis are much more accurate, as I have learned to carry a notebook with me to jot down notes in order to keep a more accurate account of situations. I learned from this experience that it is very important to keep written records, as it is unreliable to depend solely on memory.

I had to receive approval from The Ohio State University of Responsible Research Practices to interview participants in my research. This process included completing an application proving why my research should be exempt from the Internal Review Board. My application was denied twice before I went in to talk face-to-face with the Education Administrator, and then my third application passed.

As part of the process to have my project exempt from review, I had to take the 'CITI Course in The Protection of Human Research Subjects.' This on-line course is meant to ensure that researchers are aware of the laws protecting all subjects of research

in order to prevent unethical misuse of participants of research. The course involved 14 lessons with quizzes at the end of each. It took me approximately 5 hours to complete the entire course.

Upon receiving permission to begin collecting data through interviews, I quickly began the process of obtaining subjects. To control variables, my population consisted of male Ohio State ROTC seniors. I randomly selected ten cadets and asked each for their consent in participating in my study. Upon receiving their permission, I interviewed each and recorded their answers. I took each respondent into an empty room at Converse Hall for the interview. Each was first given a consent form to sign, as well as a contact number list in the event that they wanted to receive more information about the study they were involved with. After they had signed the form and settled in, we began the interview. I sat at a computer and recorded their answers after asking them the survey questions. A copy of the questions each participant was asked is shown below.

1. When did you first join the Army?
    a. Why did you join the Army?
    b. What were your feelings towards the Army at the time?
    c. What were your initial perceptions?
2. What are the two/three most distinct events that happened to you while in the Army?
    a. When did the event take place, who was involved, where did it happen, what happened?
    b. Why do you think you remember that occurrence?
    c. What were your emotions during that occasion?
    d. How did that happening affect your feelings about the Army?
3. What are you future plans concerning the Army?
    a. Where do you want to go, what do you want to do?
    b. How long do you plan on doing it?
    c. What are your feelings concerning the Army now?
4. What are you feelings concerning the level of commitment you have towards the Army?
    a. Are these feelings the same as they were when you first joined?
    b. How have they changed?
    c. Why do you think your feelings have changed?
    d. Was there ever a time you felt like quitting?
    e. What kept you from quitting?

The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. Once I had completed interviewing all ten subjects, I then began to interpret their responses. I marked answers as either being influenced more by pre-ROTC socialization or socialization during their military experience that affected their decision. The questionnaires were then divided into three categories: self-selected, mixed, and socialized. These categories are further explained in the following Results section.

RESULTS

MY HISTORY

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on September 14, 1983. I only have flashes of memories from Cincinnati; most of what I know about my life then comes from the pictures my Mom keeps. We moved to Tennessee shortly after my birth, where I spent my young life prior to attending school. Around the time I started kindergarten, my family moved once again, this time to Pennsylvania. As soon as I started the 3rd grade my family moved for the last time, back to Ohio to the town of Ontario, a suburb of Mansfield.

I grew up in a big family with 5 siblings: two older sisters, two younger sisters, and my baby brother. I was raised mainly by my mother because my father worked long hours and was constantly away on business for the railroad. It was very stressful for my mom at times, but she did a good job of making sure that we all had enjoyable and full childhoods. I credit my strong work ethic to my mother. At a very young age she enforced a strict daily chore list, including practicing musical instruments, working on school work, house cleaning, and Boy Scouts or 4-H projects.

When I finished my chores, I would go outside to play. When I was little, I tried to jump my bike off of anything. There was construction around the houses where I was growing up, and I would always wreck riding around on the huge piles of dirt surrounding the work sites. I also loved to go exploring in the woods and open fields that surrounded the housing lots where I lived. I enjoyed being outside, which translated well into my enrollment into the Cub Scout organization.

Scouts: Early Military Socialization

My time in the Cub Scouts was spent going to summer camps and completing various requirements of the program. With the aid of my parents, I progressed quickly through the program. Cub Scouts was my first experience with rank structure and skill badges. The Army and Cub Scouts have many similarities including: wearing uniforms, working to accomplish specific goals, and a hierarchal rank structure. It is interesting to look back and recognize these subtle similarities that may have influenced my joining the military. My time spent playing games, learning basic camping skills, and arts & crafts projects was fun, but eventually I reached the age when it was time to advance on to the Boy Scouts.

The Boy Scouts of America were initially created to help young boys prepare for military involvement. We wore uniforms, obeyed basic chains of command, and participated in outdoor survival type activities. As a Boy Scout I was exposed to low risk situations frequently. We would go camping in the middle of the winter, rappelling, and complete long biking trips. My first few trips I remember being afraid of being in the woods at night, however I soon became accustomed to being outside. The Boy Scouts

also do an excellent job of stressing safety and emergency preparedness. At a young age I was trained in CPR, basic first aid, and proper actions to take in an emergency situation.

My Scoutmaster in Boy Scouts was a man named David Talaga. He was an ex-hockey player and also former enlisted mechanic in the Army. Dave loved to create new and exciting adventures for our scout troop. We took a trip to Gettysburg a couple of times to visit the battle fields, visited the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, and went camping on Kelley's Island on Lake Erie. We also went camping at local campgrounds monthly and played sports weekly after meetings. We took the time to do much more than just focus on Scouting activities in that troop, and I attribute our high involvement to Dave's leadership. He strove to not only make us good Scouts, but also to make us work together, and never forget to have fun.

On our Gettysburg trip, Dave made us play football at every battle field we visited. It was always the North vs. the South; and we never played two hand tap. We would crush each other on grass, asphalt, or any other surface we designated as a playing field. There used to be a look-out tower that rose high about Gettysburg in which tourists could go up to see the entire battle field. The rules for the tower were that you could take the stairs down, but you had to ride the elevator up. Dave wanted us to take the steps up. Dave told me since I was the 'cute good-looking one' that I had to persuade the lady at the visitor's center to let us take the stairs up. I laid the thickest 12-year-old charm I could on the women, and she consented to let us take the stairs up. I don't remember exactly how cold it was that day, but I do remember there was snow on the ground. We climbed 13 flights of steps while the wind grew stronger and colder the entire assent.

Killer Ball: Risk to the extreme

My Scout troop played crazy sports all the time. One particular sport we played was called Killer Ball. To play Killer Ball you first must take a tire and run a rope in between it. Then you suspend the tire 11 to 13 feet in the air by tying off either end of the rope to the support structures holding up basketball hoops in a gym (it always seemed to be me standing on top of the back-boards tying the rope off). The rules from here were simple: split into two teams, throw a football through your end of the tire, and stop the other team from throwing the football through their end. How you chose to stop the other team was up to you. We usually decided that tackling whoever was dumb enough to have the ball was the best course of action. This quickly became a glorified mix of rugby, soccer, and football. If you were down you had to toss the ball up, you could pass whichever direction you wanted to, and there was no penalty for standing too close to the goal at any time (come to think of it, there were no penalties for anything). Whenever someone scored or there was a huge tie-up, we had a drop ball. Two players from opposite teams would lie down face-up, ear-to-ear, and then the football would be dropped towards their heads. They had to battle amongst themselves to either gain control of the ball or swat it to a waiting teammate. Thinking back to those days of playing Killer Ball in the church gym makes me smile. That game was a huge risk, but everyone loved to play it. Dave wouldn't stop with just the Scout Troop playing; he would invite our dads and members from our church to come play as well. People got injured *every time* it was played, but we still loved it.

Explorer Scouts: Risk and Assessing Situations

During my early years in high school I also was involved in the Explorer Scout program. This was organized by the Boy Scouts of America; but was more focused on particular careers. The Explorer program I was with was run by 3 local paramedics, and the focus was on learning first aid and lifesaving skills used by emergency medical services personnel. We also learned some search & rescue and fire-fighter responsibilities. All of these professions deal with risks as part of their daily routine. Safety was stressed throughout all training, and it was always emphasized to, 'never become the victim'. It was from my experiences with the Explorer program that I began to develop an understanding of staying calm under pressure. We would run through scenarios that made us think on our feet and react quickly. Scenarios were designed to simulate emergency calls, such as a nine year old falling off a trampoline or an industrial accident at the local plant. The situations also forced us to assess each situation and then make appropriate decisions for each set of circumstances. These skills are extremely important for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Professionals, and are also important skills for an Army Officer to posses.

It was with the Explorer program that I first experienced rappelling. As a group activity we went to a local area that had several different rappel towers. At first I was afraid to be on top of and rappelling from walls over 75 feet high, but soon my confidence began to grow and I felt more comfortable with myself. An important lesson I drew from my first experience rappelling was that fear should never deter me from doing something new. Inexperience and uncertainty cause the fear, however these are emotions that should be controlled and can be replaced by caution during risky situations.

The feelings I experienced and conquered from rappelling made many of my future obstacles in the Army, such as Airborne training, much easier to conquer.

High School

In high school I played basketball for 4 years and football my senior year. Through sports, I started to get more of an understanding of the importance of teamwork. Becoming an Eagle Scout, joining National Honor Society, and receiving Outstanding Male Choir Member were important individual achievements from high school. However, team achievements from my high school years mean just as much to me. I look back on my Scout Troops 2nd place finish at the Klondike Derby, my football team's undefeated regular season in 2001, and my basketball team's conference championship in 2002 with a different sense of pride. Team accomplishments are so special to me because they are something I could not have done alone. I had to be a part of something bigger than just myself, and support others as they supported me to be successful. This feeling of belonging and pride in a unit is repeated now in college with my ROTC battalion.

September 11th, 2001: When My World Changed

One of my most distinct memories from high school was the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. I was a senior in 2001, playing football and enjoying spending time with my new girlfriend. I had been accepted to Ohio State, planned on rooming with two of my best friends, and ready to get out of high school, my parent's house, and Ontario. Life was great, my future was looking bright, and nothing was going to stop me from achieving my goal of graduating high school and attending Ohio State.

I was sitting in the library messing around during study hall when I first heard the news. Someone came into the room and said, "Hey, a plane ran into the World Trade Center." As soon as I heard this I started laughing. I thought, 'Some idiot flying a tiny personal plane ran into one of the massive towers. No one will even remember the occurrence a week later.' I went to my next two classes and didn't give the matter a second thought.

Around 7th period I heard that another plane had hit the second tower. Then alarms started going off in my head. I realized this wasn't just some coincidence, something was wrong. The principle came over the loud-speaker and announced that one of the towers had collapsed. My class flipped on the news, and I saw the image of that plane hitting tower two with tower one in flames right next to it. A furry of thoughts flew through my head, 'What the hell is going on? Why are we being attacked? Who would do such a stupid and inhumane thing?'

I went to my social studies teacher before heading home that day to ask him his thoughts. He was usually pretty accurate in predicting what events would occur in society, and even made a game out of making predictions and then laughing at us when they came about. I asked him what he thought would happen next. He just looked at me and said, "I don't know". The feeling of uncertainty and despair I felt the rest of the day was overwhelming. I remember walking to my car looking at the draft card I had received only a week earlier in the mail (my 18th birthday was on September 14th). Negative thoughts kept circulating in my head, such as, "Oh my God, I'm going to war. There is going to be a draft. I'm going to become a soldier. All my plans for the future are shot, I'm going to war."

When I got home and was able to watch the day's events on TV, I thought I was going to be sick. The images of people jumping out of the buildings so they would not burn to death were particularly disturbing for me. There were firefighters running into those huge burning buildings, and you knew that was the last time they would be seen alive. I didn't understand how all of these things could happen. People do not get killed like this in the United States. We are the land of opportunity and freedom, not terror and death. This was the first time I realized that war could easily be brought to my very own country, and it was a depressing and hopeless feeling.

Today my feelings have changed. Looking back at the scared 18-year-old boy I was in high school helps me realize how much my time in the Army has change my state of thinking. There are still evil people in the world who want to harm the United States as much as they can, but I do not fear these people any more. I'm not scared of going to war; I am more concerned with making the right decisions and carrying out my duty to the best of my ability.

Through my high school years, the two largest influences were my mom and Dave. My mom enforced hard work, responsibility, and accountability in me. I know that I would not have gotten far today in school and the Army ROTC program if it had not been for her pushing me when I was younger. The work ethic my mother instilled in me has given me the advantage over my peers many times, and I'm sure it will continue to give me an edge in the future. Dave taught me some of my first lessons concerning leadership. He taught me to be an example for other boys, and that I needed to look out for the younger guys. When I became Senior Patrol Leader of my troop at 14, he trusted me to keep accountability of the younger boys during campouts and trips. The things I

learned from my mom and Dave are still helpful to this day with my current military responsibilities.

College before ROTC

I started college at The Ohio State University in the fall of 2002. I lived in the dorms on south campus with two of my friends from high school. My freshman year I was not involved in the Army, and did not even know what ROTC was. I took general education courses and some introductory level sociology classes during my freshman year. For money I worked at Don Pablos, a Mexican Restaurant that was a 10 minute bike ride from my dorm. For fun I played basketball, worked out, played video games with my roommates, and partied on the weekends.

My sophomore year I moved off campus with three other friends from high school. Early in the fall I realized that the money I had set aside for college was quickly running out. I had seen advertisements around campus and commercials for the Army reserves, so I decided to go talk with the local recruiter on campus. Sergeant Henderson was the reserve component recruiter for Ohio State at the time. I first met him in September of 2003. He told me about my options as an enlisted man, and then started asking me about school. When he learned that I was only in the beginning of my second year, he suggested I talk with ROTC. Back then I did not know what the difference was between an officer and an enlisted man, and I was not particularly thrilled about talking with the ROTC department. My plan was to serve my 4 to 6 years in the reserves to pay for college, and then get out once my obligation was fulfilled. I did not like the idea of taking military classes and having to complete assignments for the military while also

trying to concentrate on school. Nevertheless, I agreed to take one military class the upcoming winter quarter.

ROTC - My first two quarters: Initial Perceptions

I started ROTC at Ohio State in January of 2004. On top of my regular academics, I had a forty five minute Military Science class twice a week; Physical Training (PT) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings; and a two hour lab on Thursday mornings. I quickly began to gain knowledge about the military during my first quarter; I participated in my first PT sessions, was yelled at by a NCO for the first time, learned the basic rank structure, fired an M-16 rifle for the first time, and started to develop some very basic leadership qualities. Despite how well I did in class and labs, I did not make friends quickly. I was as nice to other people as they were to me; however no one really talked to me in my class. I had one or two people I knew by name that first quarter, and that was it.

My second quarter I made friends much quicker. I realize now why everyone was afraid to get to know me that first 10 weeks. ROTC has a relatively high turn-over rate: there are a lot of kids that quit. I do not know any exact numbers, but I would guess that for every cadet that ends up commissioning out of ROTC, there was at least one other student who dropped the program. The cadets that were in my class knew this, so they took their time to see if I was serious about my commitment to the program before they got comfortable with me. The way I was treated my second quarter was like night and day, because everyone knew I had stuck around after already completing one quarter.

During the spring, several critical events happened that furthered my career in ROTC. First, I took the Oath to become a Soldier in the United States Army and began

drilling with a reserve unit in Whitehall, OH on weekends. Secondly I committed to attend the ROTC Leadership Training Course (LTC) at Ft Knox, Kentucky the upcoming summer. This course would allow me to continue ROTC my junior year by teaching me what I had missed my freshman and sophomore years when not in the program. Lastly, I went on my first Army Field Training Exercise (FTX).

The annual Buckeye Battalion Spring FTX is held at Camp Atterburry, IN. It is a combined training exercise that included cadets from Ohio State, Bowling Green, Toledo, Cincinnati, and Ohio Universities. Due to my inexperience and because I was new in the program, it was decided that I would be training with the freshmen instead of with the main body. I was put in-charge of a squad of 10 freshmen who were in the program longer than I and knew more about the Army than I did at that point. I learned some of the basics about how to march a small unit around and got my first experience of being a leader of a small group in the Army. Other activities we partook in during this training included an obstacle course, riding in UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, getting to see M-1 Abrams tanks, and squad level scenario training known as Squad Training Exercises (STX).

Riding in the Blackhawk helicopters was amazing. I had never ridden in a helicopter before. The Blackhawks landed in a field while we waited in the woods for the signal to board. While approaching helicopters, you have to stay low and only approach from a certain angle or you run the risk of getting hit by the propellers, which would take your head off. My squad and I ducked into the back of our assigned bird and started strapping in. I can remember my heart pounding in my chest in anticipation of the upcoming ride. We flew with the back doors open: your seat belt and the laws of

physics were the only things keeping you from falling out of the helicopter. The wind blew mercilessly as we flew 50 to 100 meters above the ground. We banked and dove the entire time; the pilots testing themselves to see how low and fast they could cover the ground, a technique called 'nap the earth'. The pilots were not only giving us rides; they were completing training requirements at the same time. It is very important for all Army vehicles to always be in the best shape possible. The crews were really pushing their aircraft during the flights, so we were fortunate to experience one hell of a ride.

I have always been a huge fan of roller-coasters and amusement parks, but the thrill of a good coaster does not even compare to riding in Blackhawks. There is much more of an adrenaline rush because of the risk involved: roller-coasters follow a track and extremely safe controlled risks, helicopters are subject to changing weather conditions, internal malfunctions, and simple human error. All of these factors jump around in your head as you scream across the tree tops, banking at steep angles to the point that you see only the ground through one of the side doors. Besides experiencing a great ride, I also learned some lessons while in the helicopter. First, I have to be able to trust others to do their jobs. It is not only the pilots I have to trust, but also the mechanics, crew chiefs, and instructors who all play a part in ensuring that the Army has the best equipment and pilots in the world. With that, it is important to be dependable so others are able to rely on you. Finally, I began to realize that being part of the Army would allow me the opportunity to experience events that I could not in any other profession.

Leadership Training Course (LTC) – Summer 2004

The following summer I attended the Leadership Training Course (LTC) in Ft. Knox, KY from the 16th of July, 2004 until the 14th of June, 2004. This month of training was my first experience with the real Army. There I was introduced to Drill Sergeants, Army customs, and gained much of my experience in common soldier tasks. I once again had several leadership opportunities through this camp as a squad leader and as platoon sergeant for a couple of days.

During LTC I had the opportunity to fire a wide variety of weapons common to the US Army, such as the 9mm Beretta, the 2-40 Bravo machine gun, the SAW machine gun, an M-16 rifle, the 208 grenade launcher, and the AT-4 missile system. I also learned how to complete land navigation with only a compass, protractor, and a map. Other skills taught were how to cross a one-rope bridge, additional rappelling training, completing a high-ropes course, a live-fire night infiltration course, several different obstacle courses, and combat water survival training. We also went out in the field for a week and had paintball wars, zodiac boat training, completed several foot marches, and learned basic survival skills.

A lot of the kids I went through LTC with were straight out of high school. They were completing LTC as a requirement to get them into Junior Military College. This camp was their first time being away from home without their parents there to bail them out or help them up when they took a fall. I was one of the few seasoned cadets there. I already had two years of college under my belt, and already had some military experience through my 5 months in ROTC. I quickly noticed that guys started leaning on me. If someone became homesick, missed their girlfriend, or did not get any mail that day; I

was the one who took them into the bathroom after lights out and talked them into staying while they shed some tears and told me their problems. This experience taught me a lot about people. Sometimes little things can have a major effect on a person, such as not getting a letter from home. But in the same sense, a smile or compliment can make that same person's day much better. I also learned that being kind and helpful pays off. There were days I did not feel like being at Ft. Knox, but those same people I had helped were there to motivate me during the times I was feeling down.

At LTC I learned the most about the basic skills needed by a good Soldier. This is probably because it was my first true Army training, and I was willing and ready to learn as much as possible. It was great training, however there were many risks associated with the training we partook in, to include: being shot, drowning, falling from high distances, becoming lost in the woods, hypothermia, and dehydration. I remember during one training exercise seeing a fellow cadet fall off a structure approximately 15 feet high flat on her back. It seemed to all happen in slow motion, and I just remember the feeling of disbelief I felt when I heard her body smack the ground. The medics came, put her on a backboard, and took her away; and I eventually learned that she was fine. It was strange and a bit eerie to witness my first training injury.

LTC taught me the importance of looking out for others. I also learned that accidents do occur. I remember how quickly training resumed as soon as the injured girl was removed from our site. Being in the Army includes doing some dangerous things, and just by the sheer number of people who are trained, accidents will happen. However, it is important to react quickly and professionally in order to ensure all Soldiers promptly receive the best help available.

I graduated LTC and returned to Columbus, newly trained and confident I could handle anything ROTC could throw at me. I quickly learned that my junior year would be much different from my previous experience. During that year, Cadets are expected to step further into leadership roles. We are given leadership responsibilities in positions that would be filled by NCOs in the Army. These positions include Sergeant Major, 1st Sergeants, and Squad Leaders. I had proven to myself and my peers at LTC that I could be successful as a Soldier. Now I had to demonstrate my proficiency as a leader.

ROTC Junior Year - 2004-2005: Stepping into the Leadership Role and Stress

At Ohio State, the major challenge Cadets face is stress. Our instructors try to make our lives as stressful as possible without interfering with our academic progression. This stress is meant to prepare us for the rigors of becoming an officer in the Army. We are expected to complete tasks closely to perfection, even though we have never done before. There are countless responsibilities for young officers once they reach their active duty unit. Since officers are the ones ultimately accountable for the welfare of their unit, they must be ready to handle any and all situations as soon as they are placed in charge. Cadre use high standards and short deadlines in order to teach cadets to be adaptive and proficient in completing tasks.

A major risk to the Army is the under developed or unprepared officer. I have heard countless stories of men graduating from their Officer Basic Course (OBC) and within a week they were over in Iraq or Afghanistan leading a platoon. To counter the risk involved in these types of situations, it is the Cadre's responsibility to ensure that all Cadets are trained to a high standard under as much stress as is feasible. It is a difficult

process, and not everyone who tries succeeds. As our former Battalion Commander used to say, "Not all puppies grow up to be big dogs."

Nightmares: Living with My Choices

On top of the new challenges I faced with ROTC, I faced my own dilemma at home. It started dawning on me when I contracted into ROTC the beginning of my junior year that I was now committed. Before, everything had been, "Well, try it out and see what you think." But now things were real. I was training for the primary responsibility of an Army officer, leading the sons and daughters of America into combat.

My first real fear about being in the Army occurred when I was sitting at home a couple days after I had contracted. My roommate was flipping through the channels when he stopped on a war movie. It was a more recent movie, and the part we happened upon was right in the middle of a gory battle scene. In the past, watching these movies had just been entertainment. Now, it suddenly hit me that the very situation I was watching could be in my future. As soon as this thought crossed my mind, my stomach turned and I thought I was going to be sick. I watched in horror as soldiers gallantly went about their jobs, just to be mercilessly mown down by machine guns and artillery fire. Every painful death depicted was not that actor; it was me lying on some battle field in Iraq or Afghanistan.

That night, I lay in my bed wide awake. I distinctly remember wondering if my destiny was to die in combat like so many had before me. I was scared, and I kept wondering to myself, "What have I done, what have I done?" I thought about my future, and how there were so many things I wanted to do, yet I knew that none of them would

occur if I died in battle. Would I ever get married, would I ever have my own family, would I ever own my own house, would I ever have a civilian career like I had imagined?

I exhausted myself with anxiety, and fell asleep with a lot on my mind. I dreamt that I was in a fox-hole with bullets flying around me everywhere, but no matter how loud I cried for help no body answered. Then the enemy was upon me, faceless shadows of terror and doubt, and no matter how fast I ran they overcame me. I awoke breathing hard and in a cold sweat. I was beginning to understand the consequences of the risks involved with my choice, and for the first time in a long time I was scared.

I have started to cope with these nightmares, and they happen much less today. Now, I use my fear as a form of motivation. Every time I think about the possibilities I could face in combat, it drives me to become better at what I do. I know I have to become the best I can now before time for preparation runs out. In addition, I have learned to appreciate life more. My impending deployment will be the time I need to put my game face on, so I try to take advantage of all the opportunities I can now to enjoy life. Lastly, as my confidence in myself and the Army has grown, my fear of combat has shrunk. I know that I am a part of the most powerful force in our earth's history, and that the enemy fears *us* much more than we fear them.

Stone's Farm was our fall FTX in 2004. For this training we traveled to Athens, Ohio to a retired Colonel's property and set up bivouacs, trained in day and night land navigation, rappelled, crossed a one rope bridge, completed field leader's reaction courses (FLRC) and rode in UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters. FLRC lanes consisted of squads overcoming obstacles that challenge the Cadets to think clearly and work together. This training was not nearly as intense as our usual training, as it was only one

night and we were not carrying weapons at any time. However, the focus of this training was more on helping the younger Cadets improve land navigation skills and gather a feel for what the field is like.

The Browns Game

We returned, finished up fall quarter and then got a month off for Christmas break. During our break, my good friend and fellow Cadet Anthony and I went to a Cleveland Browns game. The event was on the 19th, but a huge snow storm hit on the 18th. Anthony and I drove north from Columbus to my parent's house in Mansfield on the 18th. The roads were so bad we had to pick up my mom from work because her vehicle could not handle the snow engulfed roads. The next morning, we woke up and the roads had not been well plowed and it was still snowing. My mom tried to talk us out of making the 70 mile trip up to Cleveland, but I remember telling her, "If no one is shooting at you, it isn't even fun anymore."

This demonstrates part of the mentality that I have developed from being in the Army. The Army makes training really difficult, and puts as much stress on trainees as possible. Then, no matter how intense and tough the training, there is always some Sergeant there to say, "Now imagine doing all that while being shot at by the enemy", or, "This is nothing compared to combat." There is no doubt that it was risky to drive up and back from Cleveland that day: we witnessed two vehicle accidents on the way up and at least seven vehicles in ditches on the way back. However, the thought process for Anthony and I was one of, "Ok, this is dangerous but it is not too dangerous, and as long as we are careful we won't get hurt." Even though there was a high chance of injury, we did not see the act of driving in the snow as a high threat…more of a good story. We

were not being cocky; we just had the mentality that driving in the snow is not dangerous if handled correctly.

I returned to school and continued to train my junior year. At the end of a Cadet's junior year, they are sent to Leadership Development and Assessment Course (LDAC). This camp is focused on evaluating Cadet's leadership abilities. The results from this camp impact how high a Cadet assesses: assession rank is critical to determining the future job and duty station of Cadets. Due to LDAC's importance, training is focused on preparing the juniors for this camp. We trained in battle drills, soldier tasks, and studied leadership philosophy throughout the winter and spring.

That spring I once again found myself going to Camp Atterburry to participate in the joint FTX. This time I saw a whole new side of Atterbury though, because I was with the training element instead of with the basic Cadets. The focus of the FTX is to prepare the juniors for the events they are evaluated on at LDAC: land navigation and STX lanes. It also is meant to develop social skills, as Cadets from different schools are mixed into squads with other Cadets which they have never met. We trained for 4 days and 3 nights. We spent two of the nights outside with only sleeping bags. The training lasted all day and sometimes into the night, so we did not get much sleep. Fatigue sets in after a couple of days, and I observed some of my fellow cadets become much more irritable. I learned it is important to maintain awareness and a good bearing, even when exhausted. As an officer, chances are high that one will not get enough sleep all the time, so it is important to recognize the symptoms of fatigue and know how to counter them.

We returned from the FTX and finished school for the year. The training was over; now came the test. I was going to LDAC first, then CTLT, and lastly I was going to Airborne School. It was going to be a busy summer full of intense Army training.

Leadership Development and Assessment Course (LDAC) – Summer 2005

I went 10th regiment to Leadership Development and Assessment Course at Ft. Lewis, Washington, which lasted from June 30, 2005 until August 1, 2005. This month long training was very similar to my experience the previous summer at Ft. Knox; however the key difference was I was being tested the entire time. Everything done during the training was recorded and evaluated. My overall performance for each training event, as well as six leadership evaluations, was compiled and I was then assigned a ranking for my performance at the camp. For the leadership evaluations we were put in charge of groups of our peers throughout the day or for a particular training station.

LDAC was a frustrating time for me. Unfortunately not everyone there was as motivated as I was. I would get so upset when people complained and felt sorry for themselves during hard times in the training. Did they not realize what they had signed up for? Why could they not understand that there were Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan at that very moment wishing they were at Army training instead of foreign lands? Could they not see that in a few brief years they would be leaders, and that it would be their responsibility to be the foundation the rest of their platoon built on?

Besides people who complained all the time, there were 'Spotlight Rangers' and 'Blue Falcons' to compete with. Spotlight Rangers are those people who are not good soldiers unless someone is watching. These people are huge suck-ups to evaluators; they

are trying to beat the system by only performing well when being watched by Cadre, but then do nothing when not watched. Blue Falcons are people who expected tons of effort out of you when they were in a leadership position. However when you were in leadership, the Blue Falcon had to be begged, pushed, or threatened to get any type of support out of them. They literally screw their buddies by demanding a lot out of their peers and giving nothing in return. These Spotlight Rangers and Blue Falcons really upset me. I felt that if they were already scamming this early in their career, they would make horrible officers and get Soldiers killed.

Camp also had its good times too. I met two really good guys out there who helped LDAC pass quicker. There were also some training events we completed which I had never encountered; such as a zip-line off a 60 foot tower into a lake, getting exposed to gas to demonstrate the proficiency of our gas masks, tossing a real hand grenade, and witnessing the powerful effects of artillery at a massive firing range. All together, what I learned from the evaluators and through interactions with other Cadets, good and bad, made the overall training a positive experience. I graduated camp with a high score, and the next day I was off to Ft. Bliss, TX.

Cadet Troop Lead Training (CTLT) – Summer 2005

Cadet Troop Lead Training (CTLT) is like an internship for Army Cadets. I was attached to the 286th Signal Company, whose primary mission is to support Air Defense Artillery training being done at Ft. Bliss. I learned tons of valuable information about the Army at this training. I was assigned to First Lieutenant Brinkley, who was the platoon leader for 1st platoon, affectionately known as the 'Wild Pigs'. Here I started to develop an understanding as to what my responsibilities would be as a young officer. The Platoon

Sergeant sat me down one day and asked me what the responsibilities are of a Platoon Leader. After I gave my long answer, he held up four fingers. He said, "Ensure mission completion, maintain accountability (troops and equipment), maintain a strong and vigorous training schedule, and take care of your soldiers." These are the basics to ensure that you are a good leader. However, I have begun to learn that if you complete the simple things well, everything else seems to fall into place.

Besides participating in training, I also got to do some fun things in Texas. I went to ball games and movies with other Cadets, learned a lot about Army post life, and visited El Paso. The weather was beautiful in Texas. It was hot, but the heat was dry, which was better than the humid heat here in Ohio. After completing my three weeks with 1st platoon, I went home for five days. Then, I was gone again, this time to Airborne School.

Airborne School – Autumn 2005

I was in Ft Benning, Georgia training to become a paratrooper from August 25 to September 17th, 2005. Airborne was fast, intense, and thrilling…for about five minutes. The rest of the time it was grueling, tedious, and horrible. As the Sergeants Airborne loved to point out, "Jumping out of an airplane at 1,250 ft is an inherently risky activity." In order to minimize the risk, simple and repetitive training concerning how to exit the airplane, what to do while in the air, and how to land are drilled into every student's head until the actions become second nature.

The training was broken down into three weeks; ground week, tower week, and jump week. During ground week, we focused on the proper technique to jump out of the door. When jumping from a C-130, you exit out of doors near the rear of the aircraft,

located on either side about 10 feet behind the wings. The wind from the propeller blast is traveling at over 200mph, so if you don't exit the plane correctly you are going to smack your body along the side of the aircraft. Emphasis is put on proper techniques of handing off the static line, then jumping with enough force out and away from the plane, and finally maintaining a good body position upon exit.

Next was tower week, which involves jumping from 35 ft towers and then zip-lining to a mound about 50 ft away. We also learned all about Parachute Landing Falls (PLFs), which is the proper way to land. We first jumped off walls about a foot high, and eventually built up to the point that we were jumping off of 10 foot balconies with the assistance of a pulley systems controlled by Sergeants Airborne. It is very important to land properly, because Army parachutist drop at a rate of 18 to 22 feet per second. It is not uncommon for young jumpers to suffer broken ankles and legs and concussions from not executing proper PLFs. By the end of the second week I had completed all training to standard, so the only think left to do was jump.

I will never forget my first jump. The plane pulled up to the harness shed, and Sergeant Airborne called out my chalk number. Just standing up and getting into line to board the plane made my heart start beating wildly. We walked out onto the landing strip and there sat our C-130, the back door open wide ready to receive the next crop of paratrooper trainees into its bay. When it was my turn to jump, I stood up and started moving towards the door. I was the second person in line, so I could see out the door when we were waiting for the green light. I looked out and saw how high up we were, and the ground rushing beneath my feet, and thought to myself, "What the hell am I doing? I am going to die!"

The green light came on; the moment of truth had arrived. My training kicked in, and as soon as I handed off my static line I turned and jumped. The first thing that happened was a rush of hot air from the propeller blast grabbed me and threw me back, so instead of falling immediately I was first thrown behind the aircraft. After that there was a sharp jerk as my parachute filled with air, and then I looked up to make sure it was fully deployed. After that I enjoyed the ride down. It was quite and peaceful, and the view was amazing. However, the moment was short lived because next I had to worry about landing. There is no graceful landing with military parachutes; fortunately mine was not too painful. Making and surviving my first jump was an exhilarating experience I will never forget.

Besides using repetition of correct technique to reduce risk, Airborne instructors are very strict. If you screwed up or did not follow orders, you were kicked out. This policy was enforced to convey the seriousness of what we were doing. Attention to detail was constantly stressed. When it rolled around to jump week, the Jump Masters then displayed that same discipline to us while they conducted our pre-jump checks. Once in our gear, we were checked twice by two different people. This was to ensure that the risk of malfunction was extremely low.

Despite all of these precautions, not everyone made it through Jump School. My class started with 420 people, but only graduated 306. The majority of those who did not make it were kicked out for misbehaving and not being physically fit, but we also had a lot of soldiers get hurt during their actual jumps and landings. Almost every day the number of soldiers in my Company slowly diminished. I was proud to able to make it

through my first specialty school training. It was an amazing learning experience in discipline and perseverance.

ROTC Senior Year – 2005-2006: Becoming the Role Model

After Airborne, I went back to Columbus and began to prepare for my senior year of college. My senior year was supposed to be the fun year where we got to be in charge; however I quickly learned there was nothing fun about it. During my senior year in ROTC I quickly learned about all the behind the scenes work that needs to be done for each training event. There has to be an Operations Order, rehearsals, equipment requests, risk assessments, cadre coordination, site reservation, and many other things in order to make sure training is properly executed.

Bravo Company

During fall quarter I served as the Company Commander of Bravo Company. I greatly enjoyed this time because I got to interact with the younger Cadets and really felt a sense of belonging. Any training my company did, I was able to do with them. I got to know many of the younger classmen much better during this time, as well as teach them some pointers I had learned during my time in ROTC. I count this experience as my first real leadership position in the Army. I was directly responsible for the well being of my Cadets, and Cadre ensured to hold me responsible for my companies actions. I loved being a Company Commander.

At the beginning of winter quarter I learned that the Cadre had decided to switch out the positions in the senior class. I was upset, I felt like they were taking Bravo from me. My new position was S1, which was in the Battalion staff. I thought to myself,

"OK, if they want to stick me in staff, I'll just do what I have to and enjoy some time off from ROTC." By Friday, my plans took a 180 degree turn.

Battalion Commander

We still had not been told who was going to be the Battalion Commander for the remainder of the year. After our training meeting that Friday, I was told to report to LTC Miller. I went into his office and he said, "Kris, how are you doing? You are the BC (Battalion Commander), have a nice day." I was shocked, honored, and extremely nervous all at once. Some really good people, who I looked up to, had been Ohio State Cadet Battalion Commanders before me: I was uncomfortable because I did not think I could perform to the same level that they did.

I learned the most about being a leader during my time as Battalion Commander. I thought I had an idea about what I was doing, but my experiences during the next several months showed me otherwise. I never felt as disappointed in myself as I did when I screwed up while BC: there were times I did not treat my peers as I should have, times I know I set a bad example for younger classmen, and moments when I felt like just saying, "Screw it", and quitting.

Fortunately, support seemed to come at just the right times. When I thought things were going horrible, someone would pull me aside and tell me I was doing great. Cadre were also very good about explaining to me after every time the counseled me that they knew I was learning. I learned from these experiences that it is important to keep things in perspective and to never short anyone a compliment. Most importantly, I learned that things do not always go as planned. I have been known to be a control freak, and there were times I was angry just because things were not going as *I* had envisioned

them. But I quickly discovered that what is the most important is the end result, and sometimes I just needed to step back and let others reach mission completion in their own methods.

George C. Marshall Conference

The George C. Marshall U.S. Army ROTC Award Seminar was held at the Virginia Military Institute and Washington and Lee University from April 10th through April 13th, 2006. This Seminar is reserved for the top senior ROTC cadet from each battalion who demonstrates excellent scholarship, leadership, and athletic qualities. I was chosen to represent The Ohio State University at the Seminar, which was both an honor and a privilege. During the event, I was able to participate in roundtable discussions and heard from various speakers, including General Peter J. Schoomaker, Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

The first day I arrived at the Natural Bridge Hotel near Lexington, Virginia. I was fortunate to run into one of my buddies from LDAC, Hugh Haden. The entire day was devoted to getting everyone checked in and situated. The next day, we had a presentation from Major General David Hicks while we ate breakfast. He told us about opportunities we might pursue as a member of the Chaplain Corps. After breakfast, we boarded busses and headed to VMI. There we were given our choice of three tours, of which I opted to visit the George C. Marshall Museum. Next we had a plenary session where we heard Brigadier General James E. Chambers speak. His main message was to never underestimate the men and women who are serving our country. He told us of a brave Transportation Company under his command in Iraq. Even after losing 5 soldiers

(including officers) from their Company within a month, they refused to be pulled from the front and given time to rest in the rear.

After lunch I participated in my first round table discussion. The topic was 'Ethics: An Officer's Character'. This class covered some intense situations where officers faced moral dilemmas. Two officer's stories were discussed, as well as their reactions to each situation. It was an interesting class where I learned that as an officer, there will be times that I will have to make hard decisions which I have not been specifically trained to handle. It also taught me that I'm not going to know the correct answer all the time; however I will know people who can help and offer constructive advice.

At dinner that evening, Brigadier General Susan S. Lawrence gave us a presentation. One important message she shared was to utilize our time while at work to the best of our ability, in order to ensure we do not spend too much time at work. She also suggested that when traveling, I should take my uniform with me. The reason behind this is so people know that I am a soldier; I will be able to talk with them and give them a perspective on certain world events other than the ones expressed by the media. Our final speaker of the day was Major General W. Montague Winfield, the commander of U.S. Army Cadet Command. He gave us advice on the necessity of teamwork, and also gave us some important characteristics of a good leader. General Winfield was a very active and motivated individual: I was impressed with his positive demeanor throughout the conferences.

The next day started with a second roundtable discussion. Here I had the opportunity to sit down with a Platoon Leader and a Platoon Sergeant from the 1st Armor

Division. We literally sat in a circle and were able to ask the leadership team any question. This was a very valuable experience for me, because it helped me generate a plan for how I wanted to approach working with my first Platoon Sergeant. It became clear that this first experience, and how I handled my first platoon, was very important to future success in the Army. More importantly, I realized that I must learn as much from my first Platoon Sergeant as possible in order to better care for my Soldiers.

After the roundtable, we were able to hear Lieutenant General Robert L. VanAntwerp and General William S. Wallace speak. General VanAntwerp spoke concerning the importance of accepting, understanding, recognizing attributes, and appreciating Soldiers. He also clearly stated that the Soldiers in the Army today are the best there have ever been: therefore the leaders must be the best ever. This statement hit me very hard, because it made me think of all the other great leaders there have been in history. General Wallace's remarks focused more on the enemy. He clearly stated that the enemy is smarter than a lot of Armies give them credit, and that they *do not* follow the rules. He also explained it is important for our Army to ensure we always follow the rules of engagement, so as to not lower our standards to the levels of the enemies'.

The last day of the conference, I had the opportunity to meet General Schoomaker. He spoke to all the Cadets attending, and then told us he would be waiting for us at the door to shake our hands and meet all of us. I was the last person in line to meet the General; I shook his hand, thanked him, and began walking away. After only a few steps I was stopped by one of the General's aides, who simply stated, 'The Chief wants a Cadet to walk with him to chow, wait here until he is ready.' I was totally caught off guard. The next thing I knew, I was walking down the path towards the dining

facility with the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, while being tailed by a mob of aides and security personnel. It was not until we were almost to the dining hall when General Schoomaker leaned over and said, "Cadet Whittenberger, why don't we switch sides so you don't get in trouble when we get up here." The whole time I had been walking to the right of the General, the spot reserved for the ranking officer according to military custom! I quickly apologized and moved to his left. I am sure he understood that I was not thinking clearly and meant no offense. A lasting lesson I learned from this experience was to always keep a cool head in any situation: a sharp mind is the ultimate weapon. This became a great story to share with my friends, family, co-workers, and someday my children.

Today: Ready to Lead

After almost two quarters as Battalion Commander, I have now become the same role model I used to look up to my sophomore and junior years. I am the one who is supposed to know all the answers, set the example, and lead Cadets with the same dignity and compassion as my predecessors. I have come to terms with this assignment and carry it out to the best of my ability everyday. The task is still difficult at times, but I have learned to have fun with my position. I spend more time getting to know and helping younger Cadets than worrying about if everything is going perfect. The two most important things I have learned from my time as BC are: do not sweat the little stuff, and people will care about you as much as you care for them. These are two of the most important concepts I have learned, I am glad I figured them out before I graduated.

I feel that military socialization has had the largest impact on me. I draw this conclusion from comparing my attitude when I first joined the military to my feelings

now. My original plan was to use the Reserves to pay for schooling and to spend four years in a reserve component serving as a lawyer. Now, I am branched Military Police and starting out with four years of active duty. I will be stationed in Germany for my first duty station, and then am unsure as to what will happen beyond that. I know I have thoroughly enjoyed my time thus far. I have a feeling I may end up making a career out of the military, but am not certain at this point. My experiences with the Army thus far have changed my plans once; I am not sure how they will affect my plans in the future.

INTERVIEW RESPONSES

I will now discuss the results from the interviews and where each participant fell in one of three categories: self-selected, mixed, or socialized. The first category was limited or no socialization during Army. These guys had firmly self-selected themselves before they got into ROTC to become officers and that was their mentality throughout. Four Cadets fell into this category. Their results indicated that socialization from ROTC had little or no effect on their attitude towards being in the Army. They knew before they joined the Army what they wanted to do, and experiences in ROTC only reinforced those values and emotions. One participant indicated that ever since he was a young child, he has wanted to be in the Army. This was reinforced by family tradition and examples he got from his father and grandfather. When asked if his time in ROTC had changed his feelings towards the military, he replied, "My feelings are the same (as when I first joined ROTC). I realize there is nothing on Earth I can imagine myself doing other than being in the United States Army." Another response was "Yeah, I'm just as committed as when I first joined. I'll stay in as long as I love it. You know, it's the only thing I

know." In this category, I conclude no amount, or lack there of, socialization would have altered these participants's opinion on military service.

The second category of participants was a mix of self-selection and socialization while in ROTC. These six guys had weak knowledge and feelings towards military service. They possessed an adequate understanding of the military mentality to join ROTC, however they lacked any firm commitment or beliefs. Common responses when asked how they felt after being involved in ROTC included, "I feel more committed to the Army now than I was before". Another person responded "When I first joined I was ready to go, but didn't know much. Then a time came that I wanted to go back home. Now, going home is the last thing I want to do, I want to go out there and see everything and do everything. My commitment is the strongest now than it has ever been." A third participant stated, "When I first joined, it was a 'do my time and dive' attitude. But now, if I get a positive job which I enjoy, I have no problems with staying in for twenty years." These are the guys that socialization played a large. They had a self-selective attitude for initial entry, but the extra reinforcement received through training altered their futures in the military.

The last category involved those people which ROTC completely shaped their military personality. These people had no large, if any, family military influence. I had one guy who fell into this category, and I would consider myself a member of this group. He did not have any specific reason for joining the Army; he described no interest in the military before joining. A quote from this guy was, "I didn't really care when I first joined, I just did it to pay for school. I didn't know if I would like it or not." He also commented, "I like it (the Army), I think it is something that is good for ME. Like, I

think most people don't have any kind of sense of what they want to do in life, and I don't either. The army kinda takes care of that for me. I think it's all about the people; we have some of the best people in America, that's why it's cool." This subject and I both had the military socialization as the only factor in developing our military mentality.

Participant	Category	Reason for Joining	Epiphanies	Attitude Changes since Joining
Alpha	Mixed	Always some desire to join military	Training for Ranger Competition, Experience at LDAC	More committed, was not sure if would stay in program initially
Bravo	Mixed	Tossed idea back in forth since little	Airborne School, Spring Hall of Fame Dinner	Stronger commitment to Army due to experiences and making friends
Charlie	Mixed	Needed to fill class schedule, Army classes looked neat	First Ride in Blackhawk, STX scenario	More committed, not just something fun but a beneficial experience now
Delta	Self-Selected	Serving Country is best way to make a difference	Family Influence, Death of Friend	None
Echo	Self-Selected	Mutual Agreement between childhood friends	Oath of Enlistment, Positive Reinforcement from Cadre	None
Foxtrot	Self-Selected	Form of service, wanted to serve	Airborne School, CTLT training, additional Parachuting Experience	None
Golf	Self-Selected	College and Educational Benefits	Past Deployment, Getting in Trouble	None
Hotel	Mixed	Felt it was best career path at the time	Getting in Trouble, Experience with other Service	Originally going to get out in 4 years, now considering career
India	Mixed	Some interest in youth, talked with Recruiters	Ranger Force, Nearly being Medically Discharged from Army	Stronger commitment due to experiences
Juliet	Socialized	Did not know	Conflict with Cadre, Past Deployment	Did not care at first, then enjoyed it and changed attitude

CONCLUSION

My hypothesis was that Army socialization plays the largest role in developing young students into adequate, entry-level officers. However, my results from the surveys showed that a mix of pre-ROTC socialization and time spent in ROTC both significantly contributed to pre-officer development. They also showed that many Cadets join ROTC already determined to become leaders through their own self-selection. Out of all Cadets surveyed, only one expressed socialization as main influence in shaping their decision to become a Second Lieutenant.

Further research to be done concerning socialization of ROTC cadets would be beneficial to the Army and the social sciences. A better understanding of what drives young men and women to become leaders would not only help in recruiting of Cadets, it would also aid in modifying training practices used to prepare those who chose the path of ROTC.

Additional studies would need to broaden their sample population and sample size. I limited myself to senior male cadets from one university. I also was limited to only interviewing ROTC Cadets. Participants in the other commissioning programs at West Point and at Officer Candidate School should also be surveyed.

I learned a great deal about conducting research and writing a large academic report while constructing my thesis. At times I felt that my work was insignificant and small, but I now know that the learning process is more important than the finished work. I will now discuss the specific lessons learned from my work on this project.

From reading other academic papers, I know realize the extent of background research that needs done to develop a well-written paper. I feel I did not read and cite as many sociological works as my advisor would have liked to see in my paper. In the future, I will work at becoming more knowledgeable in my field of study.

Completing the CITI Course in the Protection of Human Research Subjects was a long and tiresome ordeal. Some of the material I learned was new and useful, however I feel the majority of the information I was exposed to was never intended for an undergraduate student trying to complete a thesis. At times I also felt the application process was more of a hindrance to completing my thesis than an important lesson learned.

I ran into some problems while interviewing the subjects. First, it was very evident that some participants took their involvement much more seriously than others. While some tried to take the time to answer each question as honestly as possible, it was evident to me that others where giving quick answers they knew would shut me up. I now see that I have been guilty of committing the same act I was upset with now. There have been many times when I have gone to studies for extra credit in a class and flew through the form because I had other things to do. I realize now, from a researcher's perspective, how important honest opinions and answers are from test subjects.

The subjects knowing me well before I interviewed them had a duality of consequences involved. I feel that my relationship with them put them more at ease to answer questions honestly and truthfully. On the other hand, the familiarity with me probably also added to some subjects not taking the interview as seriously as desired.

An additional problem I noted while interviewing was my questions were not as well developed as I originally thought they were. At times I wanted to ask for additional information from subjects, however I resisted because of research ethical restrictions (asking questions I had not had approved). I also did not ask unwritten questions because I wanted to make the interview process as similar as possible for all subjects involved. A good technique to ensure my questions were appropriate would have been to conduct rehearsals first. I could have interviewed two or three individuals I knew would not be involved in my study population to ensure my interviews would answer my research question.

In a positive light, I learned more about myself than I thought possible through the creation of my life history. As I came across socialization concepts, I would find myself applying those ideas to my own experiences. Writing a life history gave me a strong grasp on my own personality.

I am glad I decided to complete an honors thesis. The learning process developed me further as a student and a leader. I look forward to graduating and becoming a Second Lieutenant, and I believe that the lessons learned during my thesis work will help me in reaching new goals in the future.

REFERENCES

Becker, Howard S. (1970). *Sociological Work: Method and Substance*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Curry, Timothy J. (1993). A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone: Athletic Career Socialization and the Normalization of Sports Injury. *Symbolic Interaction, 16(3),* 273-290.

Friedman, Richard A., M.D. (2005, June 20). What's the Lure of the Edge? *The New York Times.*

Henslin, James M. (Ed.). (1991). *Down to Earth Sociology: Sixth Edition*. New York: The Free Press.

Reynolds, L.T., & Herman-Kinney, N.J. (Eds.). *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism.* New York: Alta Mira Press.

Zurcher, Louis A. (1983). *Social Roles: Conformity, Conflict, and Creativity*. Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications.